Technology and Literacy Project

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MSU CEP 850

I-Students

I have a classroom of eight students, seven boys and one girl. They are high school seniors ranging in ages from 17-19 years old. They all have IEP’s with varying types of disabilities. Two are CI, three are LD in math comprehension and math reasoning. The remaining students are LD in reading, written expression, math comprehension, and math reasoning. The three students that are LD in math only still function below grade level in their reading and written expression. The two CI students and the three students that are both LD in English and Math read between a 2nd-5th grade level. Two of these students work with the Speech Pathologist. All but one of the entire group has a social worker within the school system. One student will be returning for half a semester after their senior year and another student is already repeating his senior year and will be coming back for a semester. The school is a public High School located in Clinton Township Michigan in the suburbs of Detroit. All but one of these students are within district. The school is 10th-12th with approximately 2,400 students.

I will develop my plan to encompass the entire class but will still put them into two groups. The first group will be my main focus group. This will consist of five students, four boys and one girl. The girl and one of the boys are my CI students. They both function with an overall IQ of 65 and 68. There is one student that moved to this country in Kindergarten from Albania. They still speak their native language in the home. Though mom and dad do not speak English, they can understand when it is spoken to them. As mentioned previously, one of these students has already completed a 5th year of high school and will be returning for an additional semester next year. All but one of these students receives services from a social worker. These students have had literacy difficulties since early elementary. In our school we have Special Education English, SLP English, and our Language program. The Language program is the class that these students belong to. This class covers basic reading and writing skills while working on decoding, spelling, comprehension, and written expression.

My second group of students or my “subset” of students are three boys. They all receive services from our social workers. They are all LD in math comprehension and math reasoning. One of these students is a diabetic and was adopted as a young child. There are many strengths among these students. The student that is diabetic is extremely talented in music. He’s in varsity choir and the jazz band. He also plays in a band outside of school. The other two students are also extremely talented. They have a wonderful personality that is hard to describe. They are both mature beyond their years. I believe that at some point they will be able to focus on finding out their other strengths. These two students are a good example of students whose first priority is survival, with schooling coming second. One of these students has been homeless several times. His family lived in a car the summer before his junior year. He is also one of the students that will be returning for another semester next year. The other student’s family also went through some eviction and bankruptcy issues during this school year.

II- Your curriculum:

My goal for both of my groups is to improve on identifying main ideas in story problems and written expression. The majority of the work that gets completed in my class are story problems. It is extremely helpful if students are able to pull out key points from the problems. This is something that both groups of students could benefit from. I believe that this goal is very important because pulling out the main idea of a story problem is the first step in solving work problems. My second goal is to have both groups work on their written expression. They will be given journals and asked to write in them explaining a problem and justify why and how they came up with their answer. They will also be asked to write any questions they may have from any lesson. Due to these students disabilities in writing, they often are not required to write. This goal will be beneficial to them because it will require that they practice their writing skills on a smaller scale. Being able to express yourself through written word is something that students will have to do in whatever career they chose. Even if it is as simple as giving a request to their boss. They will have to know how to formulate a complete sentence and convey what they are trying to get across. My subset of students are not LD in written expression and will still benefit from the written journals. Being able to explain in written mathematical equations will be very difficult due to their disability in math. I believe that I will have two challenges with my students. My first challenge will be getting students to see the importance of writing in a math class. My second challenge is the confidence level that my students express in class. These students range from having a 1st-5th grade level equivalent on their math scores. Having them believe that they accomplished not only math but reading a story problem at the same time is a huge struggle for my students.

III- Technology

I believe that technology is an intriguing part of today’s classroom. Technology is everywhere. Our students are digital natives that use some form of technology on a daily basics. It is important for their success in education and their future jobs that they use and understand technology. There are not many jobs that do not require some usages of technology. It is important that as educators that we provide as much technological support as possible for our students. The more exposure they receive the better off they will be in the future. Many times when new technology is available to our classroom, I find that the students offer me more support in learning how to use the device. Having students offer me support with technology gives students a sense of importance. In a classroom full of students with disabilities there are not many times in the school day that they feel they fully understand something. Being that technology is such a part of their life, using software systems should be of the utmost importance. Finding the correct supporting system for students to fit their needs will only help students along in their future endeavors.

My classroom has three computers that are available to the students. I also have a laptop for myself, a printer, and a SmartBoard. We have clickers and laptop carts that can be checked out at anytime for use in our room. The clickers are a wonderful tools and help the students work interactively with the SmartBoard. I can set up quizzes, warm-ups, or tests that are displayed on the SmartBorad for the students to solve. They can answer the questions using a handheld device that will instantly show me things such as who has not answered the question, who received the correct answer, what percentage of the class did not answer the question correctly, and so on. This data can be saved and analyzed for a later date. I also use the clickers as part of my notes. I will set up a question at the end of a section to check for understanding. Based on the data shown, I will know if I should review or go on to the next section.

My subset of students access technology frequently. One of the students has a personal blog and updates it often. The students not in my subset group do not access technology as often as the others but still on a frequent basis in school. Four of the five do not have computers in their homes. All eight of these students have cell phones. All but two of these students struggle when asked to do an assignment on the computer. Most of them cannot type fluently on a keyboard and struggle when as to look up information on the internet. I believe that they struggle with looking up information because of their ability to comprehend the reading material. I do try to have my students practice using the internet to search for different information presented and discussed in class. I think that this is a tool that could be extremely helpful for or detrimental to if not used correctly.

IV-Literacy Toolbox

* 1. Blogging- <http://supportblogging.com/> Students will complete blog entries to increase written expression. I will pose questions that will require that they reflect on the days lesson. I believe that this will be the best choose for my students. This will meet the needs of my students because it will allow them to work on their written expression. Being that this will be an online assignment I believe that they will become more engaged in this activity. I think this will improve their ability to improve their literacy skills. They will be asked to read other students blogs, comment, and reflect on them. This will also work on their critical thinking skills.
  2. Read & Write Gold- <http://www.enablemart.com/Catalog/Writing/Read-Write-GOLD> This program will allow student to listen to text rather than have to read it on their own. They will also be able to convert speech to text. Students will be able to speak into a microphone and the text will appear on a word document. It will help them express what they are trying to write more freely. When speaking the text they can focus more on what they are trying to express rather than grammar, context, spelling, etc. There are so many tools in this system that it will benefit each and every one of the students in my classroom. Even the students that are not LD in reading and/or written expression sill could use anyone of these features.
  3. Brain Pop- <http://www.brainpop.com/> This is a fun interactive tool that will have student practice different subjects. For the purpose of finding the main idea they can work under the “writing” tab and click on “main idea”. This will be a low pressure activity that students can engage in freely and without a grade. Being that the majority of my students are boys, playing games online is something they are very good at. They will be working on all types of classroom skills. There are tools for finding the main idea and writing.
  4. Inspiration- <http://www.inspiration.com/> Using text and images students can create many different visual aids to convey the main idea of a topic. They can also use this to create concept maps, mind mapping, outlining, etc. This tool is wonderful for students with disabilities and is also perfect for visual learners. Students sometimes struggle with how to get started writing a paper. This system will help students create an outline before working on written assignments. These are all wonderful tools that could be intergraded into the classroom with so many activities.
  5. Make Belief Comix- <http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/> This is another tool that students can use to express understanding of the main idea. They could use this system as an alternate assessment of a particular unit. The passage does not need to be extremely in-depth to convey if the students have a understanding of the meaning. This will improve their literacy skills because they will have to make sure that each passage or section in the comic makes sense and flows with the next passage. This will reinforce their written skills and their skills for understanding the main point they are trying to express.

The technology programs that I have chosen will work for all of my students, both in my original group and my subgroup. All my students could benefit from each program and I could easily work them into the classroom for everyone.

V. Toolbox Implementation

1- Blogging will be done three times a week. Students can access their blog either in the classroom, at home, media center, or phone. They will be asked to reflect on that days lessons and respond to one other students’ post. This will be done in their math class.

2- Read & Write Gold can be access for students at any time. I will require that they use it when working on their weekly reflection papers. The students in my original group may utilize the speech input feature if they would like to. I will also be able to monitor their spelling errors and how often they are accessing the system. They will all benefit from using the phonetic spell checker, word prediction, and the talking dictionary. Students will use the speech input to write their original reflection and also use the text to speech to proof read their paper before they submit it for a grade.

3-Brainpop will be used about twice a week. Students will be assigned different activities to complete on this site. These are short activities that can be completed anytime throughout the week when students have free time. They can access this system on the school computers only so it will be important that they utilize their time effectively.

4-Inspriation can also be accessed at anytime for students. I will require that they use the system at least once a week for outlining their reflection paper. The outline and the final reflection will be submitted at the same time. This will allow me to see if my students have an understanding on how to correctly create an outline and transfer that information into written form. Students will also be asked to create concept maps throughout the units. This will be a great way to assess if students are understanding the content being taught.

5-Make Belief Comix will be used about once every two weeks. This will be alternate form of assessment and will be a great way to check for students’ understanding. Since this is a math class I could give the students a math problem and ask them to create a comic strip around that problem. They can work on their written expression and the math portion at the same time.

To have these systems working effectively in the classroom I will have to train myself thoroughly before implementing them into my classroom. Once I have trained myself I will be able to work with students on how to utilize these systems independently. I will also have to create a blog site before starting the first assignment. Our school does have Inspiration on our computers. I have never used it before but I think that it would be very helpful for students to organize their thoughts.

VI. Evaluation

We do many pre and post testing evaluations over the school year. To determine if these systems are helping students improve, I will also take a pre writing sample. I have will have students enter a reply to a simple writing prompt. I will make sure that the question is something general so that I can ask the same type of question at the end of the year. I will be able to compare the two pieces of writing and be able to see if there is an improvement. I will do this evaluation along with the student.

I will be monitoring the students blog entries throughout the year. I will have weekly conferees with students about their written responses. These conferences will be held after I have reviewed their blogs for the week and the weekly reflections that have been turned in with the outline from Inspiration. I will make notes on both the outline and the final reflection piece noting points of improvement. I currently have a weekly conference with my students about their grades this would be a great opportunity to touch base about their writing as well. Many times during these conferences students will open up about many outside influences that are causing distraction during school. These conferences will allow me to have a better understanding about what challenges students are finding with their writing skills. I will be able to pull useful information from our conferences to help students become more comfortable with writing.

I think my biggest problem well be requiring my students to do so much writing in a math class. I did try to have my students do more written math problems last year and was meet with great resistance. I think it might be a challenge at first but having students complete their written assessments online may improve the chances of having students actively participate. Another challenge that I may have with implementing these tools is utilizing them in the time frame that I have drawn out. My entire classroom is comprised of special education students. We do not have to follow the curriculum as closely as the general education teachers do. That is, if it takes the general education students one week to cover a topic it may take us two weeks. I find that when this happens I tend to delete all the added activities I thought were so great over the summer to stay as closely on track as possible. I believe that if I can at least get the Blog, Read & Write Gold, and Inspiration all set up as far as training I could easily keep on track.

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